

# Beat the Heat: Make a Plan

**DOVER** – While Delaware has yet to experience a significant heat wave in 2016, the Division of Public Health (DPH) is taking the opportunity at the beginning of the summer to remind residents to prepare for excessive heat as the temperatures start to go up.

DPH advises Delawareans to expect heat waves when the temperature exceeds 95 degrees. Climate change is causing the average high temperature to increase and for there to be longer and more frequent periods of extreme heat. Our bodies have less chance to recover during hot days and warm nights, placing everyone at risk for heat-related illness. When temperatures and humidity are high, sweat ceases to evaporate and the body's natural cooling system slows down or shuts down completely. Hot weather can cause heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and severe respiratory conditions, which can be fatal.

Extreme heat is especially dangerous for seniors, young children, people with disabilities, and people with breathing conditions and other chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Also at risk are people without access to air conditioning, fans, or cooling shelters.

DPH suggests that every household make a heat wave plan in case of a power outage. Air conditioners should be serviced and electric fans should be obtained now, before the heat rises to dangerous levels. Cases of bottled water should be kept on hand and residents should listen to local news reports for the locations of community "cooling centers," which are often public libraries or churches. During days of extreme heat, Delawareans should check on vulnerable members of their families and neighbors.

DPH also urges pet owners to make a plan for caring for their pets. Animals at the greatest risk of stress from the heat include pregnant or lactating animals, very young and older animals, animals with darker coats, obese pets, short-nosed dog breeds, and animals with chronic health conditions. Signs of heat stress can include panting, increased salivation, restlessness, and muscle spasms.

In dogs and cats, such signs can include rapid panting, increased heartbeat and body temperature, weakness, lack of coordination, bright red or pale and sticky gums, vomiting, diarrhea, and depression. Owners can take steps to protect their pets by providing shade or moving animals to shaded pens, providing plenty of cool drinking water, avoiding unnecessary transportation, and walking pets.

Delaware 2-1-1 connects Delawareans with critical services and support. Eligible callers can receive referrals to summer cooling and crisis assistance, the City of Wilmington's Free Electric Fan Program for seniors, and nearby cooling centers.

### **Tips to prevent heat illness:**

- Do not leave a child or pets alone in a parked car, even for a minute. Call 911 if you see a child or pet left unattended in a vehicle. Carry water with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks containing sugar, alcohol, or caffeine, which dehydrate the body. Check with a doctor before increasing fluid intake if you have epilepsy, heart, kidney, or liver disease, or if you are on a fluid-restrictive diet. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/nutrition/index.html> for more information.

- Stay indoors on the lowest floor possible. When outdoors, wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Wear a hat or use an umbrella. Use sunscreen. Sunburn slows the skin's ability to cool itself, and has been linked to skin cancer. Avoid extreme

temperature changes. Be careful trying to cool down too quickly; a cold shower immediately after coming in from hot temperatures can lead to hypothermia, particularly for the elderly and children. In these cases, cool water is better than ice cold water.

- Limit outdoor activity, especially mid-day when the sun is hottest. Work out or hold team practices early in the morning or in the early evening. A CDC online course for coaches, athletic trainers, students, school nurses, parents, and teachers is at [cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extreme/Heat\\_Illness/index.html](https://cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extreme/Heat_Illness/index.html)

**Heed the following heat danger warning signs and take suggested actions:**

- Heat cramps occur in the muscles of the limbs or abdomen occurring during or after physical activity in high heat. Sweating results in a loss of fluids and salts that cause muscle cramps. Address heat cramps by resting in a cool place and drinking plenty of water.

- Heat exhaustion is more severe, occurring when a person is overheated along with reduced or unbalanced intake of fluids. Symptoms include dehydration, fatigue, weakness, clammy skin, headache, nausea and/or vomiting, rapid breathing, irritability, and fainting. Take these simple steps to reduce heat exhaustion: Move the person indoors or into shade. Loosen or remove the person's clothing. Encourage the person with heat exhaustion to eat and drink. Get the person to a cool shower or bath. Call your doctor for further advice.

- Heat stroke occurs when the body can no longer cool itself, and can be a life-threatening event. Prompt medical treatment is required. Symptoms include: flushed, hot and dry skin with no sweating; high body temperature (above 103 degrees F, taken orally); severe, throbbing headache; weakness, dizziness, or confusion; sluggishness or fatigue; decreased responsiveness; and loss of consciousness. If heat stroke occurs, take these

steps: Call 9-1-1 immediately. This is a medical emergency. Get the heat stroke victim indoors or into shade. Get the person into a cool shower or bath or wipe them down with continuously soaked cool washcloths while awaiting emergency responders.

For more information, visit the CDC at [cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html](https://cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html).

*A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit [delawarerelay.com](https://delawarerelay.com).*

*Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, drink almost no sugary beverages.*